Nixon Is Reported Rattled by Watergate

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WASHINGTON. — An air of uncertainty, nervousness and indecision pervades the White House these days.

One day the President announces formally, in the strongest possible language, that any ban on bombing in Cambodia would "cripple or destroy" all chance for peace in Indochina.

A few days later the President accepts a deadline, Aug. 15.

The President asks for a voluntary cutback on gasoline consumption, and for less use of air conditioners. But White House spokesmen can't say whether the President plans to observe the restrictions himself.

The White House sends a list of questions and accusations to the Senate Watergate committee, naming former counsel John W. Dean 3d as a central figure in the Watergate coverup.

The next day the White House says the charges did not represent the "President's position."

These indcidents are symptomatic of a White House severly rattled by the latest Waterhouse disclosures and deeply concerned about what may come next.

There are few signs of a smoothly working team in place of H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, who resigned April 30.

The President clearly is hiding out at San Clemente, Calif. — apart from an occasional photograph.

He has not held a press conference for more than 3½ months — since Watergate burst wide open. He hasn't had a stand-up televised news conference in more than a year.

The White House is taking the position that the President is still confused by Watergate —not sure of what happened or of how to respond.

It is an odd position for a President who has sought consistently for 4½ years to project an image of total competence, total control over the Presidential power.

Little is truly known about the President's mood.

But Swarthmore pollster Albert E. Sindlinger, who takes surveys for the White House, claimed last weekend to have seen the President privately, and said:

"He's trying to be cool, but he's climbing the walls over the Watergate affair.

Backbiting is common on the White House staff—former and present.

Last week Melvin Laird, the President's new domestic czar, permitted an interview in which he all but applied the coup de grace to Ronald Ziegler, White House press secretary.

Ziegler denied that there was any plan to replace him —saying he'd gotten reassurance directly from the President.

Dean has attacked Haldeman, Ehrlichman and the President; Haldeman and the President and Charles Colson have attacked Dean; Colson has attacked John N. Mitchell; Mitchell has attacked Dean and indirectly attacked Haldeman and Ehrlichman; etc,, etc., etc.